



AETC Bases News Clips

LUKE AFB, AZ



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Task force plan lists 27 items to save bases

The Arizona Republic

David Madrid

The governor's Military Facilities Task Force finished up the bulk of its work in Coolidge on Tuesday and will present its recommendations for protecting the state's bases to the governor Dec. 5.

The nine-member task force, led by co-chairmen R. Thomas Browning and Bob Johnston, approved 27 recommendations, including promoting the state's military facilities as an economic cluster and developing a revenue source to buy land and deal with other issues affecting the bases.

The task force recommended some legislative strategies and fine-tuned statute definitions but rejected a recommendation from Surprise to eliminate part of the current legislation to clarify that no residential development is allowed inside the noise zones. Instead, the task force agreed that the Attorney General's Office should send letters to the cities reminding them of the intent of the legislation and clarifying the attorney general's opinion on what the law allows.

It also declined to include as a recommendation an item from an advisory board of mayors to seek legislation allowing counties and cities to use taxes, development fees or taxing districts to purchase land near military facilities.

Browning said the cities themselves could recommend that to the Legislature.

Compensation for land in the bases' high-noise and accident-potential zones remains a critical issue.

Gov. Janet Napolitano appointed the task force, which began meeting in June.

Michael R. Farley, representing the owners of 650 acres in the southeast corridor of Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, complained that more land-use restrictions will be placed on landowners before they are compensated for their land. Once the base closure list is released in 2005, the urgency of compensating landowners will disappear, and they will never be paid for their loss in property value, he said.

The Arizona Republic

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Farley said the state should appraise the properties and enter into contracts with the landowners before 2005.

Browning said the task force is looking at a 20-year compensation process using 5 percent of Arizona income taxes paid by military personnel and retirees each year. He said the compensation issue should have been dealt with years ago, but now it will have to be dealt with in the next legislative session.

He said that a lot of effort has been spent by the task force dealing with private property rights and that the state should not be in the business of guaranteeing a dollar figure for land near the bases.

The Arizona Republic
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Vance AFB OK



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Vance sergeant finds thousands, gives it all back

By Jeff Mullin
Senior Writer

A routine drive home proved to be anything but, recently, for Air Force Tech Sgt. Alex Piroska.

Piroska, a non-commissioned officer in charge of the flight medical team at Vance Air Force Base, was driving home from work on a recent Friday afternoon when he saw two envelopes lying in the street in the 1700 block of West Willow.

"I saw these two envelopes sitting in the road," said Piroska. "They were just regular business envelopes. I saw cars running over them, and they weren't moving around. I just thought they were trash, but I guess it was the shape of the envelopes that kind of caught my interest."

Piroska picked up the envelopes and looked inside, where he found several checks.

"When I got home I said I'll take care of this later, because I went and watched my daughter play soccer," Piroska said.

After the soccer game, Piroska and his wife looked in the envelopes and got a surprise.

"We kind of counted up how much money was in there and we figured about \$75,000 worth," said Piroska. The checks, from various local businesses, were made out to Hammer-Williams Co.

Piroska immediately took the checks to the Enid Police Department, where he filled out a report. The police contacted Hammer-Williams and returned the checks to the firm.



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"Those were our accounts receivable," said Kyle Williams, senior vice president of Hammer-Williams Co. "It would have taken a month to go through all the things we would have had to do if we hadn't gotten those checks back, reissuing statements and calling clients to stop payment on the checks. It would have been a lot of work. Plus, oftentimes someone might find a check and go cash it."

The checks were misplaced by a longtime employee who isn't sure whether they fell out of her purse or were left on the top of her car and fell off as she left the company's West Willow offices.

Piroska received a note from Hammer-Williams thanking him for his good deed and including a certificate for a one-night stay at an Oklahoma City hotel. Hammer-Williams also wrote a letter to Piroska's commander, resulting in his receiving an Extra Mile Award this week from Col. Mike Callan, commander of the 71st Flying Training Wing. But Piroska said any possible reward didn't cross his mind when he returned the checks.

"I guess I was brought up that way," said Piroska, a native of Mansfield, Ohio and a 21-year Air Force veteran, "I was raised by my parents to always do the right thing."

"I am glad Vance always has such high quality men and women," said Williams. "I was not surprised it was someone from Vance who found the checks and turned them in."



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Enid seeks to repair runway

By Dawn Marks
The Oklahoman

ENID -- The main runway at Enid's municipal airport hasn't had resurfacing in nearly 20 years, and it's starting to show.

City officials are seeking federal funding for \$5.8 million in repairs to the main runway and a few other projects at Enid Woodring Regional Airport.

"Something needs to be done soon," airport manager Don Cornell said. "It's to the point that it's reached its lifetime."

The city has done regular maintenance to the runway, which accommodates training jets from Vance Air Force Base and commercial traffic, but hasn't resurfaced it since 1985.

The Federal Aviation Administration would fund 90 percent of the project if it's approved. There is a chance that the city could receive help from the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission for its 10 percent, Cornell said.

The FAA has funded most improvement projects at the airport, he said.

"We've rarely had to tap into the city's general fund (for airport projects)," Cornell said.

Enid News & Eagle
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The project, which would take about five years, would involve removing about 850 feet from the north end of the runway and adding to the south end.

Once that is complete, the airport would have 1,000 feet for a safety area at the end of the runway to meet new FAA requirements.

Cornell said the goal is to start construction in the fiscal year starting October 2005, but it could start sooner if the FAA gets the money it is seeking from Congress this year.



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Plan shift would aid Luke AFB

Surprise ponders land-use changes

David Madrid

The Arizona Republic

Surprise is considering three general plan amendments, one of which is designed to protect Luke Air Force Base's Auxiliary Field 1 from residential encroachment.

Surprise Mayor Joan Shafer said all three amendments would bring additional land into the city's planning area but said Surprise is planning to annex only the land around the auxiliary field immediately.

That amendment would buffer the auxiliary field's flight corridor with employment uses, sparse residential development and open space. The field is used by F-16 pilots for instrument training, with the pilots flying above the field as low as 150 feet at times.

For planning purposes, about 6,860 acres surrounding the field would be zoned for employment or airport preservation land use, which would be uses compatible with a military airport. The amendment would transfer residential density to other areas within the planning area.

It also means that if Surprise is later successful in annexing the land, 22,500 potential homes wouldn't be built there.

Nancy Monthofer of Monthofer Investments, whose company owns about 500 acres both inside Surprise and just outside the city, doesn't like Surprise's plan.

Some of her land is zoned for three to five houses per acre. With the amendment, it will be zoned down to one house per acre or one house per five acres. She says that will devalue her land, which she calls her nest egg.

"It's almost a way of having eminent domain without us being compensated for it," she said.

Shafer says Luke has to be protected.

The Arizona Republic

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"I can understand that way of feeling, but there would be nobody to buy that property if Luke left here," Shafer said.

Another general plan amendment seeks to extend the city planning area boundary by 896 acres, 617 of which are in the floodplain or within the Agua Fria floodway. It would also propose land-use designations for that area north of Bell Road, east of El Mirage Road, west of the Agua Fria River and south of the Beardsley Road alignment.

The remaining 279 acres would be zoned for three to five homes per acre.

The third amendment would add a new 71.2-square-mile planning area bounded by Arizona 74 on the south, the 287th Avenue alignment on the west, the 179th Avenue alignment on the east and the Yavapai County line on the north.

The land would be zoned for 0 to 1 house per acre.

The City Council will consider the amendments Dec. 11.



HQ AETC News Clips

Lackland AFB TX



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Lackland training center is hit with peaceful protest

By William Pack

San Antonio Express-News

A little-known Lackland AFB training school was the target of peaceful protest by about 40 people Sunday, as a much larger protest against a controversial training center for Latin American soldiers was wrapping up in Georgia.

Local protesters carried signs conveying messages like "Your Taxes Train Foreign Terrorists" and "Bush is a War Criminal and an International Hooligan" on Southwest Military Drive near Lackland's entrance. A few motorists passing the demonstration honked in apparent support. No confrontations arose with police.

That contrasted starkly with the atmosphere surrounding a protest by an estimated 10,000 people outside Fort Benning, Ga., home of the Army's training center for Latin American soldiers. About 50 people were arrested there Saturday and Sunday during annual demonstrations against a center once called the School of the Americas.

Organizers locally wanted to draw attention to a training center at Lackland they called "a sister program to the School of the Americas."

The program is called the Inter-American Air Forces Academy, which has trained Air Force personnel from Latin America for 60 years.

Stefan Wray of Austin, a spokesman for the Military Documentation Project, told protesters that government documents show the academy has been more than a school for mechanics training, as the Air Force claims. It also has trained officials in air intelligence, ground defense skills, search and rescue operations, and other military skills, he said.

A public affairs officers for Lackland said about 800 people from Latin America and the Caribbean are trained each year at the academy, which has been at Lackland for 10 years. Public Affairs Specialist Ron Scharven said he was unaware of any complaints against the school or its graduates.

San Antonio Express News

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AETC Bases News Clips

Altus AFB, OK



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Solo honors Indians whose tongue helped defeat Nazis

By Dana Attocknie, asst. managing editor

He used his feet to pick up the hoops. With each precise movement, Josh Ahhaitty shared the hoop dance, and a portion of his culture with the audience.

Ahhaitty and several members of the Kiowa Tribal Dancers opened a ceremony Tuesday at Altus Air Force Base to celebrate National American Indian Heritage month.

The dance group, dressed in full regalia, introduced a handful of traditional dances to those in attendance.

"Throughout history American Indians have been an intricate part of American character," said Col. Mark Solo, commander of the 97th air mobility wing. "Against all odds, Americas first people endured. And, they remain a vital, cultural, political, social and moral presence."

Solo presented the keynote address, after guest speaker Charles Chibitty, was unable to attend. Chibitty is the last surviving member of the Comanche code talkers from World War II.

"It is with deep regrets that I'm here, and Mr. Chibitty is not," Solo said.

However, Solo took the opportunity to acknowledge two American Indians who "helped write our military history, and our Nations history," -- Chibitty and Pfc. Lori Ann Piestewa.

Chibitty along with 16 other men in the Army's 4th Infantry Division, 4th Signal Corps, used their Comanche language to transmit orders and messages to troops.

"History has proven that our code talkers thoroughly confused our enemies intelligence collections efforts," Solo said. "Which on several occasions gave us the tactical advantage that we needed to ensure success, while minimizing risk to our own troops."

The Comanche code talkers were trained at Fort Benning, Ga. in 1941. Thirteen of them landed along the Utah Beachhead on the Normandy coast of France with thousands of Allied troops on June 16, 1944, D-day. Chibitty is said to have sent the first coded message that day.

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"The enemy never broke the code," Solo said.

The Choctaw and Navajo tribes also used their native language to help the war efforts.

"Tribal America brought to our country certain values and ideas that become ingrained in the American spirit," Solo said. "The knowledge that humans can thrive and prosper without destroying the natural environment -- and the awareness that diversity can be a source of strength rather than a source of division."

Solo recognized Piestewa by saying she made the ultimate sacrifice for her country.

Piestewa, who is Navajo from Tuba City, Ariz., was the first servicewoman killed in Operation Iraq Freedom, and the first Native American servicewoman known to have been killed during combat.

"Piestewa didn't use her native language to launch an invasion, she didn't move a mountain," Solo said. "But, her death on a battlefield in Iraq touched a nation, and changed a mountain's name."

Since the word of her death on March 23, 2003, a Phoenix mountain peak and a freeway have been renamed after Piestewa, whose support convoy for the 507th Maintenance Company out of Fort Bliss, Texas, was ambushed.

"Lori Piestewa will become part of a long list of Indian heroes throughout the course of time, equally important she will be listed in the annuals of American heroes, and it is well deserved," Solo said. "Piestewa's military service is a reflection of the dedication of our Native American soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, coastguardsmen, and reservists who are defending our Nation and traditional homelands in this time of war."

Solo said in order to make a stronger more united American community, children must be taught about the past, both the good and bad, and be provided with the knowledge and skills to surpass current achievements.

"Native American people know how to face war and sacrifice, they also know how to honor and how to show courage. It's up to all of us to show that we know how to remember," Solo said.

"Mr. Chibitty, Lori Piestewa and all the many Native American military men and women: please know that a grateful Nation thanks you very, very much."

The Altus Times
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